

News Release

Texas Animal Health Commission

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For immediate release---

“Real Life” Trials for Animal Identification Underway; Livestock Owners: Get Your Premises Number Now

Through the rest of the year, livestock identification in Texas is moving from the drawing board to field conditions to test identification devices, equipment durability and reliability. Using USDA cooperative agreement funding, the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) has awarded contracts to four manufacturers of radio frequency ear tags (RFID), five makers of tag “reader” devices, four computer software providers and a data trustee to maintain the computer records.

Tag readers and computers are set up in several livestock markets, and customers of these facilities will be issued RFID ear tags for cattle that will be marketed through the livestock markets. Two cattle firms that purchase from the three markets also will be equipped to record and report movement information as cattle are sorted and shipped to feedlots in the Texas Panhandle.

“We solicited proposals through the state’s purchasing process in March, and had an industry committee review submissions and help select the participating companies,” said Kenny Edgar, animal identification coordinator for the TAHC, the state’s livestock and poultry health regulatory agency. “Now, like a number of other states that are conducting field trials, we have awarded contracts for equipment, so we can see how well ear tags stay on, the readability of ear tags, how well equipment holds up in livestock markets under everyday use, and how accurately and efficiently data can be captured, stored and used.”

About 80,000 of the radio frequency ear tags, known as RFID tags, are being provided by Allflex USA; Farnam, Temple Tag Company and Y-Tex. The tags, to be placed on cattle, sheep and domestic deer, emit a low-frequency signal that is picked up and “read” by a device as small as a handheld wand, or as large as a gate, panel or chute. Tag readers, supplied by AgInfoLink, AllflexUSA, Farnam, Temple Tag Company and Y-Tex, will be tested for speed and durability in “real-life” conditions.

“Computer software is needed for managing the ear tag information and movement records, services being provided by eMerge Interactive, Micro Beef Technologies, Texas Dairy Herd Improvement Association 032, and the Beef Information Exchange (BIE)/AgInfoLink. The data “trustee,” or company that will hold all the records is the Beef Information Exchange (BIE), and this service will be evaluated with an exercise to trace animal movement. The results of the field tests will be reported back to the committees working on the National Animal Identification System, so the glitches with computers, ear tags or readers can be fixed before they are put in use across the county.”

“Regulatory agencies do not need or want production data; but we must be able to locate animals that have moved from a premises within 48 hours or less,” said Edgar. He and Dr. Bob Hillman, TAHC’s executive director and Texas’ state veterinarian, have made dozens of presentations on animal identification to livestock organizations and groups around the state.

“The age and class of an animal, as well as movement information is critical for locating potentially infected or exposed animals during a disease situation. In our field experiment, we are working only with cattle, sheep, goats and horses. Other states are testing identification devices or group lot numbers with poultry and commercially produced swine,” commented Edgar.

“Every state now is getting on board for premises and animal identification, to speed up livestock movement tracing,” commented Edgar. “In Texas, HB 1361 will be effect September 1, providing the TAHC authority to implement the animal identification program in Texas that is consistent with the National Animal Identification System (NAIS).

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add one/ “Real Life” Trails for Animal ID Underway

“In a disease situation, time is a key factor and makes the difference between cleaning up a small problem, or dealing with a widespread disease outbreak. The sooner we have information about where animals are located and where they have been, the faster we will be able to find potentially diseased livestock and stamp out a disease problem.”

Edgar reported that, nationally, about 90,000 premises have been identified, with about 2,200 of those in Texas. “According to the national strategic plan, premises identification will be required by January 2008, and so far, about 1 percent of Texas’ estimated 200,000 premises have been identified.”

“This premises identification number is a unique seven-character alphanumeric identifier assigned to ranches and other sites where livestock or poultry are maintained or moved. One number will suffice, even if the owner raises several species of livestock and poultry on a place,” said Edgar. “Getting a premises identification now will save time later, when it is mandatory, and folks have to wait, due to demand. Participating in the program now may enhance the value of livestock to prospective buyers.”

Registering for a premises identification number is easy, and the application is simple to complete, he said. Producers can call for an application, or they can go on the internet to register. To obtain a paper copy or schedule a presentation, call the TAHC at 1-800-550-8242. The TAHC’s home page at <http://www.tahc.state.tx.us> has a link to the premises identification application.